



COURAGE TO CARE

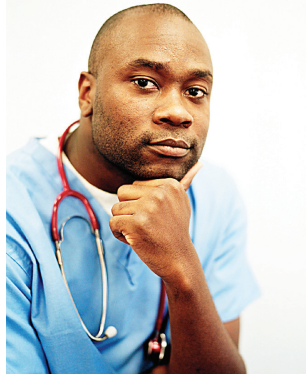


A HEALTH PROMOTION CAMPAIGN FROM
Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, your federal medical school, Bethesda, Maryland • www.usuhs.mil

FLU SEASON 2011: WHAT MILITARY HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS SHOULD KNOW

The flu season is not just a time of routine vaccination. For military healthcare providers, the flu season can provide patient-centered care opportunities: building new patient relationships; reassuring patients who are feeling the stressors of war and/or its aftermath; and, educating young parents and families about general hygiene.

Healthcare providers play a significant role in medical intervention (disease surveillance, identification, and treatment) and in



influencing patient behaviors for protecting individual, family, and public health. Addressing your patient's questions about the flu provides a 'teachable moment' for educating patients, especially parents, about important health habits that can last a lifetime.

There is also a companion fact sheet for patients, *Caring for Your Family During Flu Season*, to be placed in waiting areas or given directly to military family patients.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED RESPONSES

What is the flu, and how does it differ from the common cold?

The flu is a contagious respiratory infection caused by the influenza virus. It can cause mild to severe illness, and in some instances result in death. The flu is different from the common cold in that people with colds rarely get fevers, headaches or experience extreme exhaustion, which are symptoms of the flu.

How does the flu spread, and how long are you contagious?

The flu is spread through coughing, sneezing, even touching. You can get the flu from the cough or sneeze of someone who has it, or by touching a surface with virus-containing droplets that someone with the flu has touched (such as a door knob, stair railing or telephone) and then putting that finger or hand in contact with your nose, mouth or eyes.

People with the flu are contagious *one day before* their symptoms start and for up to 7 days *after symptoms appear*.

What are the symptoms of the flu?

The flu starts suddenly and may include some of the following:

- Fever (usually high)
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Dry cough

- Sore throat
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Body aches
- Gastrointestinal symptoms (diarrhea, vomiting, nausea); these are more common in children than in adults.

Symptoms last for a few days, but coughing and fatigue can last up to two weeks. Children may also get sinus infections and ear infections. Fevers usually begin to go down on the 2nd or 3rd day.

How Can We Prevent the Flu?

Here are some ways for avoiding the flu, which are good health habits to teach your children.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick, and don't expose others to you or your family if sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based handi wipes to protect from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Germs often spread when you touch something with germs and then touch your eyes, nose, or mouth.

What Should We Do If We Get Sick?

- Get plenty of rest, drink lots of liquids, and adults should avoid using alcohol and tobacco.

Continued

- Practice the Golden Rule: Do unto others, as you would have others do unto you, which means:
 - Stay home from work when you are sick as it puts others at risk, as well as yourself and slows your recovery.
 - Keep children with the flu at home with childcare. Be familiar with your school district's rules on returning a child to school after the flu.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing or sneezing. This will help keep others from being exposed to germs and getting sick. Be sure to throw away the tissues immediately after use.

Q: Are there medications to take if I get the flu?

Yes, two FDA-approved influenza antiviral medications are recommended for use in the United States during the 2011-12 influenza season: oseltamivir and zanamivir. These require a doctor's prescription and recommended for persons at higher risk for influenza complications. When indicated, antiviral treatment should be started as soon as possible after illness onset, ideally within 48 hours of symptom onset.

Remind patients when taking medications to "Take only as directed." Some patients might think "if a little is good, more is better."

Q: Is there a test to confirm the diagnosis of flu?

Yes. There are tests that can determine if you have the flu as long as you are tested within the first 4 days of illness.

Resources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/>
<http://www.flu.gov>
<http://www.tricare.mil/mybenefit/>

Important Advice to Adult Patients

Emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

There are antiviral medications approved for treatment of the flu that require a prescription. Consult with a doctor first.

Do not give aspirin to children and adolescents who have the flu as some are at risk for Reye's syndrome, a serious disorder that affects the nerves.

COURAGE TO CARE is a health promotion campaign of Uniformed Services University and its Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress (CSTS). CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.

